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ABSTRACT

Following a 1978 commando raid by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), Israeli troops crossed the Israeli-Lebanese border to establish a "security belt" to prevent further PLO action in Israel. A study was conducted to determine whether the coverage of the Israeli invasion by the three commercial television networks in the United States was balanced favorably or unfavorably toward the two sides. News coverage of the Middle East by the three networks was randomly selected from three time periods: one year before the invasion, the period from the PLO raid until the cease fire ten days later, and the 30-day period following the cease fire. Statements about the Israelis and the PLO were rated as either favorable or unfavorable, generally reflecting a value judgment or editorial position on the part of the news anchorperson or correspondent. Results showed that (1) the Palestinians received the greatest number of unfavorable references on all three networks during the year prior to the raid, (2) the Israelis received almost equal degrees of favorable content on all three networks, (3) all three networks showed a still more unfavorable attitude toward Palestinians and somewhat less positive coverage of Israel during the crisis, and (4) all three networks reversed the direction of their Palestinian coverage in the 30 days after the cease fire. (HTH)

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INTERNATIONAL DIVISION

THE ISRAELI INVASION OF SOUTHERN LEBANON: AN EXPANDED DIRECTIONAL ANALYSIS OF MIDDLE EAST CRISIS COVERAGE ON ABC, CBS AND NBC

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Background

The Israeli invasion of southern Lebanon in March 1978 was the fifth major military action in the Middle East since 1948. It was the largest modern military operation to occur in Lebanon. The event was precipitated by the Palestine Liberation Organization's (PLO) commando raid along the Haifa-Tel Aviv highway in northern Israel. That raid killed about 32 Israelis and wounded about 82 more. Nine of the 11-member PLO commando group were killed in the ensuing gunfight with Israeli troops, and two of the commandos were captured.

The Palestinian attack occurred on the eve of Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin's trip to Washington, D.C., to discuss with President Jimmy Carter the ongoing peace negotiations between Israel and Egypt. Begin postponed his trip to handle the new and brewing military situation in Israel.

On March 14, 1978, the invasion began under the cover of night and an Israeli communications blackout. Israeli troops supported by tanks and tactical air groups crossed the Israeli-Lebanese border to establish a "security belt" that would prevent the PLO from further action into Israel. The Israeli assault continued until March 21, three days after they had reached their apparent objective, the Litany River in southern Lebanon.

Earlier, on March 19, the United Nations Security Council had passed Resolution 425, calling for an Israeli withdrawal and the establishment of the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). The Israelis accepted the cease-fire on March 21, seven days before the PLO accepted it on March 28. The Israelis withdrew in stages, and had completed their evacuation of Lebanese territory by mid-June of 1978.

In Rehovoth, Israel, on October 24, 1979, an Israeli military court convicted the two commando survivors for their part in the Haifa-Tel Aviv highway raid. They were sentenced to life in an Israeli military prison.

The following research project is an analysis of American television news coverage of the crisis and the periods before and after the events in Israel and southern Lebanon.

Introduction

Balanced political reporting of the news is an accepted ethical obligation of the modern American broadcast media[1]. And, although the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) Fairness Doctrine delineates "fair and adequate treatment of controversial issues,[2] it is considered "incapable of effective enforcement,[3] and does not apply to coverage of foreign news[4].

Michael J. Robinson wrote that only limited attention has been given to the way television networks cover foreign news[5]. And, because the Fairness Doctrine does not apply to coverage of international events, "analysis of foreign news would provide an opportunity to study an area where political values would be likely to influence news judgments directly[6].

The criteria which journalists use to evaluate the politics of other countries are sometimes shifting, contradictory and hypocritical, according to Robinson, who further argued that:

> Under these conditions, network journalists have only a limited sense of what objectivity is. Hence, journalists covering foreign news will have their guard down to some degree. In that environment, we can expect clearer instances of 'political' bias[7].

Bias, defined as an imbalance in coverage of issues, individuals and institutions, is a frequent criticism of the television news treatment of the Middle East, because divergent interest groups think they see "unfair and even slanted reporting"[8].

However, in the case of television news coverage of the Israelis and the Egyptians before, during, and after the Camp David summit meeting of the U.S., Israel and Egypt, no imbalance in favorable and unfavorable content was found by Diamond and Cassidy[9]. Using content analysis techniques, they concluded that bias was easy to dismiss in coverage of the event. They wrote: "at Camp David, ABC, CBS and NBC carefully meted out equal, straight-down-the-middle, news treatment to the Egyptians and the Israelis[10].

Communications researchers have given considerable attention to Edward J. Epstein's argument, in News From Nowhere, that imbalances that do occur are not caused by political biases[11]. Basically, Epstein concluded that the "news is problematic," and that "its final formulation is, to no small extent, a product of an organization."[12] Epstein wrote that "in short, the tendency of network news to focus their attention on certain causes to the comparative neglect of others proceeds more from organizational problems than from the political biases of individuals."[13]

Even if Epstein's contention were fully accepted, which it is not[14], he admitted that "it could still be maintained that the critical decisions tend to be ideosyncratic in nature--personal judgments that vary with the events, individuals and circumstances[15]."

Most researchers agree that a baseline with which to compare the results of content analysis is needed. Thomas Patterson wrote that the absence of a baseline necessary for comparison is perhaps the

greatest problem facing content analysts[16]. In an effort to develop systematic knowledge about television news, Patterson suggested that content analysts make use of more comparative research designs, "especially those involving comparisions across time and comparisons across mediums. /sic/ Such comparative designs are valuable in providing a baseline for assessing results[17]."

C. Richard Hofstetter argued that political and situational biases exist in addition to structural, or organizational, bias[18]. He defined political bias as "selectivity that is based on political prejudices of news personnel, individually or collectively[19]," and defined situational bias as coverage that is "influenced by a set of circumstances that may or may not be related to the structural biases of the medium[20]." Both structural and situational biases can have political consequences[21].

As Hofstetter noted, it is a vexing problem trying to disentangle political, structural, and situational kinds of bias, and that determining political bias may be overly restrictive[22]. Robinson agreed, pointing out that "content analysis or network news has defined political bias too narrowly[23]," and, that even if the circumstances which foster political bias are identified, such as in foreign news, "we still have no strategy for determining the exact mixture of political, organizational, or other factors which influence television news content[24]."

The current investigation utilizes content analysis with baselines of time and other media in an attempt to establish a method for determining some degree of political bias in network coverage of foreign news.

Hypotheses and Research Questions

Robinson's contention is one of the three hypotheses of this investigation. The first is that although imbalances have not been substantial in television news coverage of American political campaigns[25], with at least one exception[26], imbalances can be found in coverage of foreign news, in this case, in news of the Middle East.

The second hypothesis is that if imbalances were to occur, they would most likely occur during a political or military crisis. Remember, the Diamond and Cassidy study did not involve a crisis; the event they investigated was an attempt to prevent future crises.

The third hypothesis is that imbalances found in network news of foreign countries may be due to political biases of the networks, not the result of structural aspects of the news organizations, or the situational aspects of the events.

The questions to be answered, then, are: first, were the valences, or the degree of favorability/unfavorability, or statements about the specific referents (here defined to mean those countries involved in this study) balanced during the period of the Israeli invasion? Second, did the valences of statements change during times of crisis? And, third, if imbalances existed, was there any evidence to support the idea that these imbalances were the result of political bias?

Significance of the Investigation

The significance of this study is in the hypotheses and the primary research questions, and that the event occurred during what duPont recognizes as "one of the largest--if not the largest--commitments to continuing coverage of a developing story in the annals of

television[27]." These particular events were chosen also because they involved the latest major military action to occur in the Middle East at the time of this writing, and major portions of the networks' available news hole were used to cover the story[28].

Research Design

Television network coverage of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in southern Lebanon was considered to be the focus of the study, but other Middle Eastern countries were not excluded from the study.

To determine if there were any changes in the valence of statements about the referents during the event, a research design was developed that was sensitive to time as well as to the military, political and other issues involving the Middle East.

Three time periods were selected to provide the data base for this study. Time One was the one-year period prior to the PLO raid into Israel. Time Two was the period from the PLO raid until the cease-fireten days later. Time Three was the thirty-day period following the cease-fire.

Sampling

Once the communication sources (ABC, CBS, NBC) and the dates were determined, it was possible to satisfy the study's objectives by sampling the relevant content[29]. For this study, a complete list of all Middle East stories broadcast by the three television network evening news programs was compiled from the Vanderbilt Television News Archives Index.

During Time One, the year before the invasion, at least one of the networks covered the Middle East on 254 of the possible 261 newsdays used. From these 254 newsdays, 30 dates were randomly

selected. Not all of the networks covered the Middle East on the same days; during the 30 days drawn, ABC covered the Middle East on 26 days, CBS on 25, and NBC on 22 days.

Using a similar sampling method, a constructed week[30], consisting of five newsdays, Monday through Friday, was selected for Time Three. Each network was sampled separately to ensure that five newsdays would be included in the sample.

Because of the short duration of the conflict in southern Lebanon, the entire period was analyzed; the reduction of data by sampling so small a universe could have risked the researchers' ability to generalize from the findings.

Coefficient of Imbalance

To compare the networks' treatment of the referents in this study, a coefficient of imbalance formula was used. The coefficient, by definition, provides a single figure showing the relationship between favorable and unfavorable coverage[31].

The coefficient does not discriminate between a slightly favorable and a highly favorable statement. Only the attitudinal direction is indicated and inferences about relative strength of assertions can be made only on the basis of "more or less favorable" or "more or less unfavorable[32]."

Coding was conducted using videotapes supplied by the Vanderbilt Television News Archives. The unit of analysis was the individual assertion, defined as a complete thought unit always connected to a verb. Units were analyzed by geographic location, major issues, and the direction of the assertion as favorable, unfavorable, neutral or irrelevant.

Coders were instructed to be careful not to confuse negative

events with negative assertions. International tension, for example, caused by external factors did not necessarily constitute an unfavorable assertion, unless the referent was depicted as uncooperative or wrong in the resolution of the conflict.

Assertions, then, classified as either favorable or unfavorable generally reflected a value judgment or editorial position on the part of the anchor or correspondent. These conditions were easily discerned by a lack of attribution, attribution by a hostile source, and/or lack of videotape supporting the statement.

Each assertion with a single referent was coded once, but three coding decisions were required: the referent, the subcategory and the valence. Thus, for this study, over 25,000 coding decisions were made to provide the data for the coefficient formulae.

Findings

During the coding, it became apparent that it was virtually impossible to separate the PLO from other Palestinians. Anchors and correspondents frequently made no distinction between the groups, and, therefore it was necessary to collapse them into one category of all Palestinians.

For the first time period, or the base year of coverage, the Palestinians received the most unfavorable coefficients of all referents on all three networks.

ABC's coefficient was the most unfavorable toward the Palestinians (-.097) and was a noticeable departure from that network's attitude toward other Middle East referents.

Table 1: Coefficients of Imbalance -- Time One

Referent	ABC	CBS	NBC
Palestinians	-.097	-.045	-.024
Israel	+.008	+.010	+.015
Egypt	+.017	+.011	+.069
All Arabs	+.002	-.002	+.011

CBS' coefficient was not as strongly unfavorable towards the Palestinians as was ABC's, and NBC's was the least unfavorable. However, none of the networks exhibited a favorable, or even neutral, attitude toward the Palestinians during this constructed baseline month.

On the other hand, the Israelis received almost equal degrees of favorable content on all three networks, although it was barely positive. The Egyptians received slightly favorable treatment from two networks; NBC's coefficient of imbalance for Egypt was the most favorable of all referents for any network during all three time periods -- +.069.

When Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, the Palestinians and other Arabs were collapsed into one category of all-Arab, the coefficients obtained were almost perfectly neutral, although NBC's strong pro-Egypt coverage made its overall Arab coefficient more positive than the other networks'.

The second period of analysis--the crisis itself--showed a still more unfavorable attitude toward Palestinians by all three networks, while the Israeli coverage also became less positive.

Table 2: Coefficients of Imbalance -- Time Two

Referent	ABC	CBS	NBC
Palestinians	-.135	-.081	-.128
Israel	+.0002	-.002	-.001
Egypt	+.005	+.007	+.045
All Arabs	-.030	-.022	-.021

As in Time One, the ABC coefficient for Palestinians was the most unfavorable, although NBC registered the strongest shift, from -.024 to -.128.

Table 3: Palestinian Coefficients and Degree of Change

	ABC	CBS	NBC
Time One	-.097	-.045	-.024
Time Two	-.135	-.081	-.128
Direction & Degree of Change	-.038	-.036	-.104

All other referents received almost exactly neutral coefficients on all three networks, except, again, for the Egyptians on NBC (+.045). Further analysis of the Egyptian subcategories revealed that 40 percent of the Egyptian coverage involved peace negotiations, and the remainder various political issues and events.

Coefficients obtained for the all-Arab category were slightly more unfavorable in Time Two because the Palestinians were included in the formula. When they were excluded from the computations, the all-Arab coefficients were almost exactly neutral: ABC was -.002; CBS was -.003 and NBC was +.002. Palestinian coverage affected the all-Arab category coefficients more in Time Two than in Time One because of the larger amount of Palestinian coverage during the crisis period. When Palestinians were mentioned it was mostly within the subcategory of military activity.

During Time Three, the follow-up coverage in the 30 days after the Israelis accepted the cease-fire, all three networks reversed the direction of their Palestinian coverage. For ABC and CBS the coefficients were favorable, while NBC was almost neutral.

Table 4: Coefficients of Imbalance -- Time Three

Referent	ABC	CBS	NBC
Palestinians	+.033	+.048	-.006
Israel	-.001	-.035	+.003
Egypt	-.013	+.036	.000
All Arabs	+.0007	+.001	-.003

Although NBC's Palestinian coefficient did not differ greatly from the coefficients found in Time One, the degree of change from Time Two to Time Three was similar to the change found in the other two networks, and was a noticeable shift in the degree of unfavorable to favorable coverage.

Table 5: Palestinian Coefficients and Degree of Change

	ABC	CBS	NBC
Time Two	-.135	-.081	-.128
Time Three	+.033	+.048	-.006
Direction & Degree of Change	+.168	+.129	+.122

The Palestinian subcategories were examined to try to find an explanation for the reversal in the direction of coefficients from Time Two to Time Three.

NBC's coverage during Time Three primarily involved political, rather than military coverage, and reflected a fairly neutral attitude toward the Palestinians.

For ABC and CBS, however, the shift was a reflection of their change in coverage from military to political issues. ABC's coefficient for political Palestinian coverage was positive (+.093), and CBS' still more so (+.309). This revealed that the favorability involves primarily political issues rather than military activity. ABC's military coefficient (+.015) was very close to neutral and CBS' was exactly neutral.

The overall degree of change from Time One, the baseline period prior to the crisis, to Time Three, after the cease-fire, showed a positive change in coefficients for all three networks towards the Palestinians, and a negative shift towards Israel.

Table 6: Palestinian Coefficients and Degree of Change

	ABC	CBS	NBC
Time One	-.007	-.045	-.024
Time Three	+.033	+.093	-.006
Direction & Degree of Change	+.130	+.093	+.018

Table 7: Israeli Coefficients and Degree of Change

	ABC	CBS	NBC
Time One	+.008	+.010	+.015
Time Three	-.001	-.035	-.003
Direction & Degree of Change	-.009	-.045	-.012

The shifts in unfavorable coverage for Israel were not, however, as pronounced as the shifts toward more favorable coefficients for the Palestinians. Moreover, the coefficients of imbalance toward Israel were much closer to neutral than were those of the Palestinians.

Conclusions

The first two hypotheses of this investigation were the easiest to deal with. First, were the valences, or the degree of favorability/unfavorability, of statements about the specific referents balanced during the period of the Israeli invasion of Southern Lebanon (Time Two)? Clearly, there were noticeable imbalances toward unfavorable Palestinian coverage on all three networks, relative to the almost perfectly neutral coverage of the Israelis. Thus, the conclusion can be drawn that statements about the primary referents, the Palestinians and the Israelis, were not balanced during the crisis.

Second, did the valences of statements change during a time of crisis? By comparing the coefficients of imbalance during the three times, one finds there were noticeable changes in the direction of statements, or the valances of statements, about the Palestinians over time corresponding to the crisis. Thus, the authors conclude that the valences of statements do change for some referents during a time of crisis, at least in this investigation. Moreover, this change to a negative coefficient for the Palestinians was not indicative of a change from Time One, prior to the crisis, compared with Time Three, after the cease-fire. Over the longer period of time, the coefficient became more favorably biased towards the Palestinians, in stark contrast to the negative shift evidenced during the crisis period.

The third question addressed in this study is the most difficult. Once the imbalances were evident in Palestinian coverage in Time Two, the question became: what evidence existed in the data to support the theory that the imbalances were the result of political bias by

the networks, or network? It is the conclusion of this study that there is evidence that not only did political bias exist on all three networks, but also that the coefficients for the Palestinians constituted a general measure of that bias.

What Epstein failed to recognize, and other researchers since the development of Janis and Fadner's coefficient of imbalance formula in 1955 (and which this study overlooked for many months), was that the formula is not sensitive to organizational aspects of the media. For example, the fact that there are many correspondents in Jerusalem covering the Israelis, and only a few in Tyre, Lebanon, covering the Palestinians could have an impact on the amount of coverage about those two referents. Thus, counting the number of times a referent is mentioned would not separate the organizational bias from the political bias of a medium. Thus, Epstein would be correct in saying that political bias cannot be determined by that method of content analysis.

Yet, when the investigation is expanded to include the direction, or valence, or statements about referents, which is a requirement of the coefficient formula, the organizational biases of the medium should be eliminated. That is, the Israeli coefficient is not sensitive to the number of times the Palestinians were mentioned, and vice versa. The coefficient is only a measure of what is said about a specific referent, irrespective of other referents and the organizational biases of the medium studied.

Further, only situational biases could effect the coefficient. However, it was an express condition of this investigation's coding principles to eliminate the effects of favorable and unfavorable situations by coding them as neutral. Situational bias, then, could

not skew the coefficient away from zero. Only the opinions of the anchors and correspondents, and the editorial staff, could have favorable, or unfavorable, effect on the coefficient. The resulting coefficient, then, is a measure of bias.

The best example of the political positions of the networks during the crisis came from an ABC editorial by Howard K. Smith, wherein he described the Palestinians' raid as a "terrorist, sickening atrocity[33]." This statement was identified as an editorial, and, therefore, a justifiable comment by Smith. But the anchors and correspondents on all three networks repeatedly referred to the raid as a senseless act, a terrorist act, an atrocity, and referred to the Palestinians as terrorists. These were the statements that skewed the coefficients against the Palestinians, and the authors conclude that they were political in nature, not the result of organizational aspects of television, or the situational aspects of the events. Thus, during the crisis period, the network news broadcasts were biased against the Palestinians, although this was a diversion from their trend over time to become more neutral, even positive.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Phillip J. Coffee, "A Quantitative Measure of Bias in Reporting of Political News," Journalism Quarterly 52 (Autum 1975): 551-3.

[2]Donald Gillmore and Jerome Barron, Mass Communications Law, (St. Paul, Minn.: West Publishing Co., 1974) p. 801.

[3]Ibid. p. 803.

[4]Michael J. Robinson, "Future Television News Research: Beyond Edward Jay Epstein," Television Network News, ed. William Adams and Fay Schreibman (Washington, D.C.: George Washington University, 1978), p. 206.

[5]Ibid.

[6]Ibid.

[7]Ibid.

[8]Edwin Diamond and Paul Cassidy, "Arabs Vs. Israelis, Has Television Taken Sides?" TV Guide, January 6, 1979, p. 7.

[9]Ibid.

[10]Ibid.

[11]Edward Jay Epstein, News From Nowhere (New York: Random House, Inc., 1973), p. 270.

[12]Ibid.

[13]Ibid.

[14]Thomas E. Patterson, "Assessing Television Newscasts: Future Directions in Content Analysis," Television Network News, ed. William Adams and Fay Schreibman (Washington, D.C.: George Washington University, 1978), pp. 179-80; Michael J. Robinson, op. cit., p. 209.

[15]Epstein, News From Nowhere, op.cit., p. 41.

[16]Patterson, "Assessing Television Newscasts," op.cit., p. 209.

[17]Ibid.

[18]C. Richard Hofstetter, "News Bias in the 1972 Campaign: A Cross Media Comparison," Journalism Monographs, November, 1978.

[19]Ibid.

[20]Ibid.

[21]Ibid.

[22]Ibid.

[23]Robinson, "Future Television News Research," p. 209.

[24]Ibid.

[25]Ibid., p. 200; Robert L. Stevenson, Richard A. Eisinger, Barry M. Feinberg and Allan B. Kotok, "Untwisting the News Twisters: A Replication of Efron's Study," Journalism Quarterly 52 (Summer 1973): 211-19; Hofstetter, "News Bias."

[26]Edith Efron, The News Twisters (Los Angeles: Nash Publishing Co., 1971).

[27]Alfred I. duPont, "TV Diplomacy and Other Broadcast Quandries," Columbia Journalism Review, May/June 1979, p. 70.

[28]Data from the Vanderbilt Archives for the daily newscasts during this period reveal that the news broadcasts devoted as much as 10 minutes and 50 seconds of a half-hour newscast to the conflict.

[29]Bernard Berelson, Content Analysis in Communication Research (New York: Hafner Publishing Co., 1971), p. 179.

[30]For both the constructed month and the constructed week, each relevant newsday was assigned a number to correspond with numbers drawn from a hat to select, for the constructed week, as an example, all five days from Monday through Friday. This helps control for variations in coverage on certain days of the week or during the month. For details on the constructed week concept as designed by Carter and Jones, consult Richard W. Budd, Robert K. Thorp and Lewis Donohew, An Introduction to Content Analysis (Iowa City: Iowa University, 1963), p. 25.

[31]The statistical concept of a coefficient of imbalance as formulated by Janis and Fadner (see Budd et al, Introduction to Content Analysis) is designed so that it will:

1) Increase in the positive direction when the frequency of units of favorable content increases.
2) Increase in the negative direction when the frequency of units of unfavorable content increases.
3) Equal zero if all units of content are neutral or if there is no relevant content.
4) Equal zero if the number of units of favorable content is equal to the number of units of unfavorable content.

The coefficient for total favorable content is equal to +1.00. Total unfavorable content is equal to -1.00. The statistical formula necessary to compute the coefficient of imbalance when there are more units of favorable content than unfavorable content is:

$$C_f = \frac{f^2 - fu}{rt}$$

The formula when there are more unfavorable units than favorable units of content is:

$$C_u = \frac{fu - u^2}{rt}$$

[31]con't.

Where f = favorable units of content
u = unfavorable units of content
t = number of units of total content
r = total units of relevant content

Note that r = favorable + unfavorable + neutral units of content

t = favorable + unfavorable + neutral + non-relevant units of content

[32]Thomas M. McNulty, "Network Television Documentary Treatment of the Vietnam War, 1965 to 1969" (Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University, 1974), p. 43.

[33]Howard K. Smith, ABC World News, March 13, 1978.